

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3996

S E C R E T JIDDA 1797

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FOR UNDER SECRETARY SISCO & SECRETARY ATHERTON
FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, SA, JO, US, XF

SUBJECT: JORDAN'S AIR DEFENSE PROBLEMS

REF: (A) JIDDA 1697, (B) STATE 54657

1. BEFORE I COULD REQUEST MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD AL-FAISAL ON THIS SUBJECT, HE CALLED ME IN THIS MORNING AND MADE FOLLOWING STATEMENT.
2. HE SAID I WAS NO DOUBT AWARE OF THE COMMITMENT WHICH THE SAUDI ARABIAN GOVERNMENT HAD MADE TO HELP REINFORCE JORDAN AIR DEFENSE. THIS HAD BEEN MATTER OF DISCUSSION WITH UNITED STATES AND IT WAS SOUND CONCEPT. TO THAT END THE SAG HAD COMMITTED \$300 MILLION ON THE BASIS OF US ESTIMATE THAT SUCH AN AMOUNT WOULD COVER THE COST OF THE EQUIPMENT TO BE ORDERED. SINCE THAT TIME THEY HAVE BEEN INFORMED OF A "HORRENDOUS" INCREASE IN THE AMOUNT REQUIRED WHICH IS NOW ESTIMATED AT \$750 MILLION. KING HUSSEIN HAS REQUESTED THAT THE SAUDIS PROVIDE ALL OF THESE FUNDS, BUT THE AMOUNT OF THE SAUDI COMMITMENT WOULD NOT BE CHANGED.
3. HE SAID IT WAS PROPER FOR KING HUSSEIN TO BE CONCERNED BECAUSE THE AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM WAS ESSENTIAL FOR
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HIS COUNTRY AND BECAUSE HE COULD OBTAIN SUCH A SYSTEM FROM

THE SOVIETS FOR ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF THE CURRENTLY ESTIMATED US COST. SAUD WHEN ON TO SAY THAT IT IS NOT JUST JORDANIAN PRESSURE, IT IS A REAL REQUIREMENT. HUSSEIN'S CONCERN IS UNDERSTANDABLE ALSO BECAUSE HE IS UNDER PRESSURE FROM HIS ARMY OFFICERS. HUSSEIN OF COURSE KNOWS THAT THE SAUDIS DON'T WANT TO SEE THE SOVIETS MOVE IN AS SUPPLIERS TO JORDAN. THE MATTER RESOLVES ITSELF INTO QUESTION AS TO WHAT HUSSEIN WILL FEEL COMPELLED TO DO. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT IF THE UNITED STATES AGREES TO PROVIDE SUCH A SYSTEM AT A STATED PRICE BUT LATER INDICATES THE COST IS TO BE MUCH GREATER, THIS CREATES PROBLEMS FOR JORDAN AND FOR SAUDI ARABIA. HE WANTED TO TALK TO US ABOUT THIS IN AN EFFORT TO EVOKE FROM US SOMETHING WHICH WOULD TAKE CARE OF HUSSEIN'S NEEDS WITHOUT CREATING PROBLEMS HERE.

4. I SAID WE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THIS MATTER AND I WOULD LIKE FIRST TO REQUEST THAT SAUDIS DEFER FINALIZING MATTER AT \$300 MILLION LEVEL IN COUNCIL OF MINISTERS UNTIL WE HAVE TIME TO REVIEW WITH HIM AND OTHER SAUDI OFFICIALS SUCH ALTERNATIVES AS WE CAN DEVELOP FOR A SUPPORT PACKAGE THAT MIGHT ENABLE GOJ TO ACQUIRE AN AMERICAN AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM MORE IN KEEPING WITH ITS AVAILABLE RESOURCES. I ASKED IF HE AGREED TO HOLD OFF ACTION THAT I COULD COME IN ON THIS SUBJECT AS SOON AS I HEAR FROM WASHINGTON ABOUT THE RESULTS

OF THE EFFORT PRESENTLY UNDER WAY TO FIND ALTERNATIVES. HE AGREED TO THIS AND WAS INTERESTED TO HEAR THAT WE ARE ALREADY WORKING ON AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH. I SAID I COULD NOT OF COURSE SAY WHAT WOULD BE THE REACTIONS OF JORDANIANS TO NEW IDEAS WE MIGHT DEVELOP, BUT IN ANY CASE I EXPECT TO COME BACK IN TO SEE HIM IN THE NEAR FUTURE ON THIS SUBJECT.

5. SAUD SAID THAT HUSSEIN WILL GO TO THE UNITED STATES AFTER HE VISITS JAPAN AND HE HOPED WE WOULD USE THE OCCASION TO TRY ON ALTERNATIVES THAT WOULD KEEP COST WITHIN THE GENERAL RANGE OF THE COMMITMENT ARRANGED BY THE SAUDIS. I SAID I FELT SURE WE WOULD DO OUR BEST WITH HUSSEIN WHEN HE ARRIVES IN WASHINGTON.
PORTER

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